# 'THE RINGWOOD FIELD NATURALIST'
# CLUB NEWSLETTER

**ISSUE No. 40 APRIL 2015**

*EDITORIAL*: This month the Newsletter reaches yet another milestone in its twenty-year history with the fortieth issue rolling off the presses (or onto the website). Regular readers will note that the occasion has been marked by making some changes in the current issue. These are designed to present a broad spectrum of topics about Australian natural history of interest to field naturalists. Further developments will be introduced in future issues. The Editor takes this opportunity to thank those members with expertise in their field who have provided intelligent support and responded positively when invited to contribute articles over two decades, thereby enhancing this publication's role "to further the study of Natural History in all its branches".

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*Members gather at Rise and Shine Reserve on Sunday of the Newstead weekend*

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## VISITORS TO OUR GARDEN by Alison Rogers

On a very warm day in December 2011 I came home from a day out and found most of the plants in my front garden covered in little green and orange bugs. They were writhing in large clumps on the foliage and flowers, not being particular about which they were on, but all covered in large quantities. Some of the branches were so weighed down that they were in danger of breaking off.

Checking various sources on the internet, I found these bugs were called 'plague soldier beetles' (*Chauliognathus lugubris*). They are around 15mm long, with a flat soft body with a thin yellow-orange stripe just below the head and on the tip of the tail area.

I was relieved to find that they were listed as not being a problem in gardens, as they didn't eat or strip foliage or flowers. After nearly a week in the garden we had a cooler day and they nearly all disappeared. Interestingly, our garden, nature strip and cars, out in front of our place, had huge swarms, whereas our neighbours' gardens only had small numbers.

In December 2012, we again had swarms of these beetles in our street. This time they swarmed on our neighbour's property, covering most of the grass nature strip, up tree trunks and on bushes in their garden. We only had a few in our garden. On studying them for a while I noticed they were swarming in the flowering eucalypt on the nature strip, frequently dropping to the ground in clouds. Only a few were feeding, with the rest in a mating frenzy.

Further investigation showed these beetles are swarming in Victoria. On trips we have found them in swarms at Yarram, and in small numbers in Mansfield, Ballarat and Echuca.

They travel in swarms of thousands, gathering to mate after months of living as larvae underground. The beetles are native to Australia and despite their name, they are quite harmless to humans, pets or plants and do not bite. They do have a nuisance factor, but if left

**VISITORS TO OUR GARDEN (CONT)**

alone they will disappear. If disturbed they can give off a chemical, which seems to keep most birds away. It has been noted that noisy miners seem to eat them. (We do have those at our place).

The last couple of years we have had numbers of them, but not in such large swarms.

This year, 2015, has brought out the numbers again with large swarms in the local area. Tree butts, nature strips and driveways are covered in the beetles, once again usually in or under a flowering plant or tree.

One good thing in having them in your garden is that they are known to eat aphids. I'm sure we will find they will come back next summer.

I wonder how many of you have had them visiting your garden as well?

## REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

When Carol Page submitted this photograph of a small fly taken near Harrietville in January this year to Ken Walker for identification, she had no idea what the consequences would be. Ken's reply states: "Well, I sent your image to a fly specialist at the Australian Museum (Dan Bickle) and he was confused but had a suggestion that it was a strange type of Bombyliidae so he sent the image to the world Bombyliidae specialist, Neal Evenhuis at the Bishop Museum in Hawaii who confirmed it was a Bombyliidae and placed it in the genus Pygocona. Neal also said that your specimen is a female which makes it difficult to place to species. There are only two species of Pygocona in Australia. I then took a look on the web and found other similar like images of your fly - outside of Australia. So phew! It took an international effort to name your interesting fly. By the way, the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) currently has no images or record for this genus of fly in Australia so your record will be their first when it gets uploaded next Monday!! Congratulations and thanks for sharing. For me, this is what citizen science is all about."

Taxonomy
Animalia: Arthropoda: Insecta: Diptera: Bombyliidae: Pygocona

*Cryptostylis subulata* (Large Tongue Orchid)

Following the January Field Trip to Jam Jerrup, several members took the opportunity to visit The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve nearby and were pleased to find several good specimens of this orchid in flower. This species grows in south eastern Australia. Plants may be up to 50 cm tall. The large green lanceolate leaves arise from the base. Flowers appear October to March.

Salt Water Lake, Westgate Park

Another rare phenomenon photographed by two members was the startling colour of the Salt Water Lake in Westgate Park over the summer months. The lake is a bright pink, which is believed to be caused by a natural interaction between a single cell green alga and a halobacterium in response to very high salt levels.

## FIELD TRIPS

### NEWSTEAD CAMP - 19-21 September 2014

Leaders: Roger and Inta Needham

Using Newstead Racecourse and Recreation Reserve as our base, the Newstead Campout attracted 29 members and one visitor.

On Friday 19th September at 4pm, we walked along the Loddon River, south of the Pyrenees Highway Bridge near Newstead, through a River Redgum Gallery Forest, with the most significant discovery being a family of 3 Powerful Owls, 2 adults and a juvenile.

Saturday morning began at a balmy 3 degrees and at 9am our convoy left the Racecourse bound for the "Quince Tree" in the Muckleford State Forest. Members dispersed through the bushland in this area and a number of interesting birds were recorded, including a Square-tailed Kite on a nest.

At 10.30am we drove 3-4 km west to Smith's Reef Track adjacent to the Castlemaine-Maldon Road. There were few birds at this site but the area contained a profusion of wildflowers. After morning tea members explored the bushland looking for any hidden floral treasures. Our next destination was the Red, White and Blue Mine site. An intended 10 minute stop expanded into 30 minutes as several exciting bird sightings arrested our attention. At noon we returned to Newstead Racecourse for lunch in the shade of a large pine tree.

Afterwards we visited Cairn Curran Reservoir and the Moolort Plains. First stop was Annands Lane where Alan Veevers brought out a 'scope enabling us to spot a number of waterbirds. Then to Picnic Point and Frogmore Swamp on the western shore of the Reservoir. We had afternoon tea at a reserve beside the Loddon River, downstream from the Reservoir at Baringhup. From Baringhup the group split, with some travelling to Maldon and others continuing to Woolshed Bay on the eastern shore of the Reservoir before returning to Newstead.

Members enjoyed a barbeque tea in the Camp Kitchen at the Newstead Racecourse. David Hewitt brought his mothing gear, but as we were distant from bushland few moths graced us with their presence.

## NEWSTEAD CAMP - 19-21 September 2014 (cont)

On Sunday morning we visited The Rise and Shine Bushland Reserve and spent the next 3 hours exploring the reserve, finding a number of orchid species and sighting several birds.

After lunch at the Racecourse we headed for Muckleford Gorge led by local naturalist Geoff Park. The Gorge is on private property and we were privileged to be able to visit. While 18 people explored the steep track into the Gorge the rest found orchids, other plants and birds on the plateau near the car park.

The weekend finished with afternoon tea in the car park. About half the participants returned home while some spent another evening in this lovely central Victorian town. Our thanks to all who participated.

## Point Nepean - 11th October 2014

Leaders: Judi and Steve Duke

The day commenced with a briefing in the carpark at Gunner's Cottage, followed by a walk through the nearby cemetery and down to the shore near Observatory Point. This landform is made up of a series of parallel sandy ridges, which have extended outward by progradation from the Pleistocene dune calcarenite forming the shoreline. From this vantage point, views of other Bay landforms may be seen, including Mud Islands and the Rip. Next we walked to Cheviot Hill to admire the view at altitude. We returned to the cars and relocated a short distance to have lunch in the shade of a large Coast Manna Gum. The twisted forms of *Melaleuca lanceolata* formed an interesting backdrop. In the afternoon we drove to the Quarantine Station, hoping to walk along the beach, but with the waves lapping the sea wall we abandoned this option.

## Cambarville - 16th November 2014

Leaders: Hazel and Alan Veevers

Cold, wet, wintry conditions and leeches challenged the 19 members who met at Cambarville and explored the site of the old township. The severe weather even affected local wildlife and Common Grass-blue butterflies (*Zizina labradus*) were observed clinging to grasses in a seemingly torpid state. We drove to the next carpark and set off in search of the Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) known as the Big Tree. Passing through a beautiful remnant rain forest of Myrtle Beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), many ferns, mosses and lichens were in peak condition having been refreshed by the recent rain. Following lunch back at the rotunda, a unanimous decision was made to retreat to Marysville where conditions were better. A visit to the Beauty Spot revealed how well the vegetation was recovering after the 2009 fire, and since our last visit about a year ago. Finally, we enjoyed the magnificent spectacle of Steavenson's Falls.

## Jam Jerrup/Stockyard Point - 18th January 2015

Leader: Jackson Airey

27 members and 2 guests from the Peninsula FNC met on a cool, overcast and windy morning at the southern carpark at Jam Jerrup. After a brief introduction to the area we headed onto the beach for the 30 minute walk to Stockyard Point. Stockyard Point is one of the best and most accessible shorebird-watching sites in Western Port and we were hoping to see some international visitors. Arriving at the point we saw two fishermen on the shore and hoped that they had not scared off the birds.

## Jam Jerrup/Stockyard Point - 18th January 2015 (cont)

Rounding the point we found a large flock of excellent numbers of three Australian shorebirds - Red-necked Avocet, Banded Stilt and Pied Oystercatcher. There were also Caspian Tern and Gull-billed Tern (a reliable site for them) in amongst the Silver Gulls. Unfortunately there were no migratory waders in the flock. Crossing a small creek, with several members having "adventures" in the mud, we saw a solitary Musk Duck and 3 Wedge-tailed Eagles in the far distance. We returned to the carpark, in wind and light rain, for our lunch, after which members dispersed as the unpredictable weather closed in.

## "The Briars" - 14th February 2015

Leaders: Eleanor and Warwick Dilley

Fifteen members braved the elements to spend the day in Mt Martha. Early showers of rain eventually subsided as we commenced the walk. The reward for our perseverance was that the place was very quiet and so we saw far more birds and animals than might have been expected. We spent the morning doing the Ker-Bur-Rer Walk around the sanctuary, branching off to take in the wetlands walk back to the visitors' centre. Highlights were the Wedge-tailed Eagles on the way in to the car park, the Australasian Grebes doing repair work on their nest, and the Red-necked Wallaby.

By lunchtime we had blue skies and sunshine, and after lunch we drove to Ferrero Park and followed the boardwalk beside the Balcombe Creek to the Estuary, and Mt Martha beach. The heavy rain had caused the estuary waters to break out through the sand to join the bay, so there were plenty of birds busy in the mud finding food and providing photo opportunities.

# FIELD OBSERVATIONS

## NEWSTEAD WEEKEND - September 2014

### Orchids in flower

*Caladenia carnea* Pink Fingers
*Caladenia phaeoclavia*
Brown-clubbed Spider-orchid
*Diuris chryseopsis*
Small Golden Moths
*Diuris pardina* Leopard Orchid
*Glossodia major* and *G.minor*
Waxlip and Small Waxlip
*Microtis* sp. Onion Orchid
*Pterostylis nutans*
Nodding Greenhood

### Dicotyledons

A booklet listing some of the plants seen may be found on the Club website. Some highlights were: River Red Gums on the Loddon River; Goldfields Grevillea, Grey Parrot Pea, Spiky Guinea Flower

### Fungi:

*Laetiporus portentosus, Psathyrella* sp?

### Some significant birds

Yellow-tufted and Fuscous Honeyeaters, White-browed Babblers, a Crested Shrike-tit Muckleford State Forest
Scarlet Robins, Pallid, Shining Bronze and Fantail Cuckoos at Red White and Blue Mine
Black-eared Cuckoo, a Diamond Firetail along with Flycatchers, Thornbills and Honeyeaters in Rise and Shine Reserve
Wedge-tailed Eagle chicks in the nest Muckleford Gorge

## POINT NEPEAN - October 2014

A total of 31 native species of birds were recorded, which included: Australasian Gannet, Great Cormorant, Swamp Harrier, Brown Goshawk, Sooty Oystercatcher, Masked Lapwing, Caspian Tern, Crested Tern, Nankeen Kestrel, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Superb Fairy-Wren, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Willie Wagtail, Eastern Yellow Robin, Silvereye

An unexpected record for the list was a Scarlet Honeyeater calling loudly at Cheviot Hill, definitely the find of the day.

The following plants were in flower: *Acacia longifolia, Dianella revoluta, Hibbertia sericea, Lagenophera stipitata, Leptospermum laevigatum, Leucopogon parviflorus, Microseris scapigera, Pomaderris paniculosa, Pultenaea tenuifolia, Scaevola albida, Stackhousia monogyna, Swainsona lessertiifolia (purple and white-flowered forms), Themeda australis,* while *Clematis aristata* was covered in fluffy seeds.

Several specimens of Satin-green Forester Moth and members of the *Geometridae* were observed at the cemetery.

## CAMBARVILLE-MARYSVILLE - November 2014

The following plants were in flower: *Bedfordia arborescens, Billardiera scandens, Cassinia aculeata, Clematis aristata, Comosperma volubile, Coprosma hirtella, Dianella tasmanica, Goodenia ovata, Olearia lirata, Pomaderris aspera, Pultenaea sp., Stackhousia monogyna, Stellaria flaccida, Viola hederacea.*

Fern species prominent in the understorey included *Adiantum aethiopicum, Blechnum nudum, Blechnum wattsii, Dicksonia antarctica, Grammitis billardieri*, *Histiopteris incisa.*

Fungi: *Schizophyllum commune, Stereum illudens*

A total of 31 native species of birds were recorded, which included: Common Bronzewing, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Australian King-Parrot, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater, Spotted Pardalote, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Golden Whistler, Satin Flycatcher, Flame Robin

Geological Setting: Cambarville is situated among the deeply dissected slopes of the Armstrong Creek Catchment. A Silurian-Baragwanathian fossil site of international importance on the Marysville-Woods Point Road reveals the bedrock to be approximately 400 million years in age.

## JAM JERRUP/STOCKYARD POINT - January 2015

A total of 33 native bird species of birds were seen, including the following: Black Swan, Musk Duck, Australian Pelican, Great Egret, White-faced Heron, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Banded Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Australian Pied Oystercatcher, Masked Lapwing, Pacific Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Australian Hobby, Superb Fairy-wren, Red Wattlebird, Little Wattlebird, Brown Thornbill, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Grey Fantail, Little Raven, Welcome Swallow, Silvereye

## FIELD OBSERVATIONS (CONT)

### THE BRIARS MT MARTHA - 14th February 2015

A total of 54 native bird species were recorded. Interesting sightings included: Emu, Black Swan, Australasian Grebes, Common Bronzewing, Australasian Darter, Eastern Great Egret, Royal Spoonbill, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Black-fronted Dotterel, Spotted Pardalote, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Dusky Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Rufous Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Eastern Yellow Robin, Mistletoe Bird.

**Butterflies** identified were Common Brown, Ringed Xenica, Splendid Ochre, Cabbage White

**Marsupial** sightings: Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Swamp Wallaby, and Red-necked Wallaby

### STOP PRESS

Club members who attended the SEANA weekend 13-15th March enjoyed an interesting and varied programme. Based in the beautiful bushland surroundings of Pax Hill, the programme included excursions to Wombat Forest, Creswick, Lake Burrumbeet, Mt Buninyong and Lilwarre (a member's property at Scarsdale). One of the most popular options was Ants in an Urban Environment. Speakers introduced the local flora and fauna and the various venues. Martin Scuffins from Hawk Haven Wildlife Shelter spoke on his work in "Birds of Prey - Nursing the Fierce" and his companion, a one-eyed Barn Owl named Min Min was the hit of the evening. Thanks to Ballarat FNC members for organising a great weekend.

## BOOK REVIEW

As an insight into the indigenous plants to be found across greater Melbourne, Flora of Melbourne has never been rivalled. Conceived more than 30 years ago and first published in 1991, the book revealed to us the great diversity of all that once grew – sometimes still does – in Doncaster as opposed to the Dandenongs, or Mitcham rather than Moorooduc. With its discussion of soils, climate and the other (both natural and man-made) factors influencing the spread of plants, the book has become only more relevant as the city has continued to grow, with its fourth – revised and much expanded – edition launched recently.

Neville Walsh, senior conservation botanist at Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens, who wrote the book's foreword, describes the whole endeavour as "trying to pin down a moving target".

Urban growth, weed incursion and climate change continuously ring in the changes. The tree form of Banksia marginata, a once-common feature (according to early surveying reports) in such places as Altona, Collingwood and Essendon, is now critically endangered in Melbourne and reduced to two trees at Plenty Gorge and up to 40 in Warrandyte. *http://www.smh.com.au*

## Dates for your Diary

25th-27th September 2015 - SEANA Weekend - Donald History and Natural History Group

**Friends of F J C Rogers Reserve, Heathmont,** hold a working bee 12:00-2:00 pm on the 1st Wednesday of the month, Feb-Dec. Fred Rogers was a Foundation and Life Member of the Club and the Reserve contains an important diversity of local flora. Members welcome.

**Free Environment Seminars** are held by Manningham Council on the **first Wednesday of the month (Feb – Dec) at 7:30pm.** All are welcome. No booking is required.

Ringwood Field Naturalists Club Inc. Reg.No. A 9601 ABN 29099297169
Website http://www.rfnc.org.au

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